

**Talking points on the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction,  
by the Director for the Secretariat of the UNISDR, Mr. Sálvano Briceño**

**Informal briefing panel to Missions during ECOSOC, 11 July 2001**

Topic: Natural Disasters, preparedness and response  
(UNDP, ILO, PAHO/WHO, OCHA and ISDR Secretariat, chaired by Mr. Ross  
Mountain)

Most of the statements we heard today during ECOSOC session, Humanitarian Segment, **recognized that the increased incidence and magnitude of disasters pose a major threat to the local, national and international communities.** According to MunichRE in 1999 alone, disasters resulted in the loss of more than 100,000 human lives and in economic losses amounting to over US\$ 100 billion. In the 1990s the economic costs of disasters grew at 10% a year, a rate that the globe clearly cannot sustain for long. If dimensions of climate change, environmental degradation and increased social and economic vulnerability, are added to the scenario, it could certainly be worse. More than 90% of disaster victims live in developing countries. Disaster reduction is therefore vital.

However, although vital, **disaster reduction is insignificant as a budgetary priority.** Of global investment in disaster management, some estimations show that 99% goes to response or preparedness – only 1% or less is directed towards prevention, and almost all of it is spent in the richer countries.

To address these problems, and as a successor arrangement to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the international community adopted the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The ISDR provides an international framework for responding to the challenge presented to the international community by the increased incidence and scale of disasters which result in massive loss of life and long-term social, economic and environmental consequences for vulnerable populations world-wide, in particular in developing countries. The ECOSOC and General Assembly in 1999

(Res/54/219) also endorsed the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish as main instruments for the implementation of ISDR, **an Inter-Agency Task Force, drawing from UN Agencies, regional bodies and civil society, and an Inter-Agency Secretariat, to serve as the focal point within the UN system for disaster reduction.**

The Geneva Mandate on Disaster Reduction adopted in 1999, reaffirms the necessity for disaster reduction and risk management as essential elements of government policies. Building on other precedents,<sup>1</sup> the mission of ISDR is to **to help societies to become resilient to the effects of natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters** and thus, reduce human, economic, social and environmental losses. Additionally, the General Assembly mandated the ISDR secretariat to continue promoting international cooperation to reduce the impacts **of El Niño and other climate variability** and to **strengthen disaster reduction capacities through early warning.** I remind you that the ISDR and El Niño items will be presented at ECOSOC on Wednesday 25 July. The report of the SG on ISDR is available here today.

Much still needs to be achieved, despite the major ‘conceptual shift’ achieved, from the traditional emphasis on disaster response towards a more integrated disaster *reduction* approach, based on the recognition that interventions designed to reduce the vulnerability of communities and assets could greatly limit the human impact of disasters. As stressed already by my colleague from UNDP the **disaster reduction concept, therefore, involves measures designed to prevent, mitigate and prepare for the adverse impact of natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters.** The ISDR goals must be promoted as an urgent priority on the international development, environmental and humanitarian agendas, in particular in the current process of Rio+10 and preparation for the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

ISDR also **serves as an important bridge between the humanitarian concerns and those in the social, economic and environmental** fields. The Strategy is envisioned as a

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<sup>1</sup> The IDNDR experience, the Yokohama Strategy (1994) and the Strategy “A Safer World in the 21st Century: Disaster and Risk Reduction”(1999) provide the basis for future endeavours with regard to disaster reduction.

broad international **and multi-sectoral commitment** (building on and leading to national or local commitment) **linked to sustainable development**.

**This endeavor builds on bringing people, organizations and sectors together in a multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral and inclusive professional relationship**, which is a major role of the ISDR Secretariat to promote.

The ISDR Secretariat plays a **servicing and facilitating role** to pursue the principles outlined in the ISDR Framework Document, prepared for the ISDR Inter Agency Task Force (copies available on the table). In this role, the Secretariat backstops the Task Force and its Working Groups, namely WG I on “Climate and disaster reduction”, led by WMO; WG II on “Early Warning”, led by UNEP; WG III on “Risk Assessment and Indicators”, led by UNDP; and WGIV on “Wildland Fires”, led by IUCN/Global Fires Monitoring Center in Freiburg, Germany, and also addresses other UN organizations, regional constituencies, academia and scientific community and professionals, public and private sectors, civil society organizations, media and others. Special emphasis is put on interacting with national platforms as part of the ISDR outreach. They all represent active substantive partners and stakeholders for disaster reduction. These organizations are the ones that ensure a multiplying effect and action to implement the policies and measures to reduce the impact of disasters promoted by ISDR Framework.

The ISDR Secretariat is envisioned as the **hub** in this global system for disaster reduction. In order to achieve this role, the Secretariat is gradually becoming a **global Clearing House facility and reference for disaster reduction related issues**, that will bring added value in terms of visibility and information access to all partners in the network, as envisaged by the UNGA resolution. This **overall function**, in addition to being a main tool for information management (reception, processing and dissemination), provides the Secretariat with a platform to develop and support its other main functions, such as:

- policy- and inter-agency coordination/facilitation;

- improved horizontal networking with and between national and local constituencies, international and regional organizations related to the topic, academia, NGO:s etc;
- advocacy and public awareness; drafting of UN messages; promotion of specific topics of concern (as early warning, El Niño, mainstreaming, etc.),
- backstopping to TF Working groups and convening additional expert groups, etc.

**Specific and distinct information and knowledge** products are envisioned to be an essential outcome of the ISDR work, based on **thematic priorities** and **regional development**, as cross-cutting dimensions of all work done.

The input to the processes necessary to feed into these functions is best carried out from a **regional perspective**. The ISDR Secretariat, is gradually outposting part of its staff in several regions (it is already the case for Latin America and the Caribbean, with an outpost in Costa Rica, hosted by PAHO). It is planned to continue in Africa with support of UNEP and Asia, ADPC and ESCAP. This **regional outreach of ISDR** will build on and support existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms in different layers.

**Parallel and inter-linked national processes as for Agenda 21 (Rio+10), climate change, poverty eradication, combating desertification** and other related national, regional or global networks or policies are also important platforms to address, directly or through members of the Task Force.

### **What is being done**

Many countries, with the assistance of international organizations and other actors in the disaster reduction community, have begun to put in place policies and institutional arrangements and also to adopt initiatives, including the increased application of science and technology, designed to reduce the impact of natural hazards and related technological and environmental phenomena.

**The ISDR Secretariat, as a service platform for the ISDR**, is working on several specific issues, in addition to the general functions I already mentioned:

- The issuance of a **systematic Global Reporting on Disaster Reduction Initiatives**;
- Development of a common understanding of disaster reduction and its several components, and compilation of a **comprehensive Terminology** for this purpose;
- Continued engagement to backstop **the Inter-Agency task force working groups**;
- Development of proposals for cooperation and backstopping **of national constituencies and platforms**;
- Development of **risk assessment methodologies** as part of awareness for disaster reduction at local and national levels;
- The provision of the **UN-Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction**, sponsored by the Nippon Foundation and administrated by the ISDR Secretariat;
- Public awareness and **Global Campaigns**, working closely with media, to promote disaster reductions together with partner organisations and based on concrete experiences in the field of disaster reduction.
- Development and maintenance of an **interactive clearing-house and web service** for the disaster reduction constituency.

Development organizations, such as those present here today - most of them members of the Inter-Agency Task force for ISDR- like UNDP, the World Bank (Disaster Management Facility and the ProVention Consortium) and regional development banks, among others, have special programmes or formulated policies and action plans for disaster reduction, with emphasis on risk reduction as an essential component of sustainable development. We are certainly learning a great deal from them.

Scientific and technical organizations such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), UNESCO, UNEP, ICSU and others are providing the scientific rationale for the integration of risk considerations in sustainable development planning and practices, that relate to hazards, climate change, environmental protection, vulnerability and risk indicators, among other concerns.

### **Some issues for the future**

Progress at the national and global levels will require commitments from public authorities, improved scientific research on the causes of natural disasters, substantive educational, training and awareness programmes and better international cooperation to implement and achieve the goals of the ISDR and to reduce the impact of climate variables, such as El Niño and La Niña.<sup>2</sup> Pending measures to be further developed include:

- **Early warning as an integrated process**, including coordination among relevant agencies on hazard monitoring; vulnerability mapping; impact prediction; technological development and transfer, as well as the communication aspects; education and professional training; public information and awareness raising; interface between the public and private sectors in order to ensure adequate reaction to warnings; and retrospective evaluation of the effectiveness of early warning systems.
- **Guidelines and methodologies** which enable local authorities, institutions and communities to carry out risk assessments using local knowledge and capacities as well as raising the awareness of decision makers to the need for the strict application of risk reduction legislation and building codes.
- National governments must **incorporate disaster risk reduction into sustainable development and national planning processes** and implement arrangements designed to reduce the social and economic impact of disasters. Resources must be directed towards prevention and mitigation efforts, not in isolation, but as an investment for a sustainable development.

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<sup>2</sup> A process has been initiated by the United Nations General Assembly, in view of the extensive impact of disaster caused by the 1997/1998 El Niño/La Niña phenomena.

- Within the United Nations, efforts still need to be made to incorporate the issue into the development agenda, and assist countries to do the same.

***We will need your support and guidance to ESTABLISH DISASTER REDUCTION AS A CORE FUNCTION OF THE UN SYSTEM that would make the international strategy for disaster reduction a permanent goal of the UN. We shall work towards a safer world, to reduce risk and promote proactive and integrated risk reduction management, to protect lives, livelihoods and cultural, economic, social and environmental assets.***